



# THE BOOK AND THE SWORD

*This article is an adaptation of the remarks delivered by Yeshiva University President, Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, at the presentation of the Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Book Prize.*

**W**e all understand how charged this moment of time is for us sitting here tonight, and for the entire Jewish people. Many of us have children, nephews, and grandchildren fighting in the IDF right now. My son is in Givati, near Jenin, my nephew is in Gaza — they tell me they are safe; I allow myself to believe them. In a larger sense, all the soldiers fighting to defend the Jewish state are

our sons and daughters. We are glued to the news to hear any words of change, of progress, of loss God forbid, and of triumph.

On a much different scale, but still deeply disconcerting, we are all also sadly aware of the rise in antisemitism across the globe, in the United States, and especially on college campuses.

As we continuously work to support our brothers and sisters in the IDF and in Israel, we are also engaged in this struggle on college campuses on behalf of all the Jewish students around the country, and indeed for higher education and the future of the United States.



## **Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman**

*President and Rosh Yeshiva,  
Yeshiva University and RIETS*

It is with this backdrop that tonight's event takes on even greater significance. Tonight, we celebrate the book selected as this year's winner of the Rabbi Jonathan Sacks Book Prize. Given the theme of the book and the fact that the author is a distinguished teacher of Israel, it is of course organically fitting for us at this time to celebrate him and his book.

But there is a greater point to this moment to which I wish to draw your attention.

The midrash teaches us:

ספרא וסיפא ירדו כרוכים מן השמים.

*The book and the sword descended intertwined from heaven.*

**Sifri, Ekev no. 40**

I have long been intrigued by this image — the fact that the book and the sword are not just represented at the giving of the Torah, but are seen as interwoven. Similarly, the Midrash teaches:

הר חורב שבו נשמעה החרב.

*[Sinai] is called “Har Chorev” because it is there that the sword (cherev) was heard.*

**Tanchuma, Bamidbar no. 7**

One can see the sword (*cherev*) in the very name of the place in which the Torah was given (*Har Chorev*).

These two elements, the book and the sword, represent two very different sources of power. The sword represents physical strength and prowess. It speaks to soldiers on a field of war, or politicians and world leaders on a geopolitical scale. The book, however, represents the power of ideas. At first blush, one might think that the sword is stronger than the word. But all who study history know the truth that Shakespeare once noted, how those wearing rapiers (swords) are afraid of those with goose quills.

The victories of the sword are ephemeral, but ideas can penetrate in ways eternal.

At Har Sinai, the midrash teaches that wars will be necessary. Your difference will not go unchallenged; your blessing will need to be won and you will be

required to raise fighters who know how to wield a sword; but that is not the purpose. Your purpose is Jewish values, your purpose is the ideas, you are here to live by and spread Torah — you are here for the book.

Looking at Israel, fighting against terrorism, and even combating antisemitism here, we know we need the tenacity and strength that is embodied by the sword.

But what this moment has also shown is the central significance of our book.

My friends, we have seen very clearly the moral abyss beneath too many of our institutions of higher education. Some of the “elite” universities might have very large endowments, but they are morally bankrupt. Now more than ever we need institutions

 <p><b>CORE TORAH VALUES</b></p> <p>Yeshiva University is a unique ecosystem of educational institutions and resources that prepares the next generation of leaders with Jewish values and market-ready skills to achieve great success in their personal and professional lives, endowing them with both the will and wherewithal to transform the Jewish world and broader society for the better.</p> <p>YU.EDU/VALUES</p>	<p><b>TORAT EMET</b></p> <p><b>אמת</b> TRUTH</p> <p>We believe in truth, and humanity's ability to discover it.</p> <p>The pursuit of truth has always been the driving force behind advances in human understanding, from Socrates' wanderings through the streets of Athens to the innovations of the Industrial Revolution. People of faith, who believe in a divine author of Creation, believe that the act of discovery is sacred, whether in the realm of philosophy, physics, economics or the study of the human mind.</p> <p>The Jewish people in particular affirm that beginning with the Revelation of the Torah at Mount Sinai, God entrusted eternal teachings and values to us that we must cherish and study diligently above all else, for they represent the terms of the special covenant that God made with us. All people, regardless of their faith background, should value the accumulation of knowledge because it is the way to truth and a prerequisite to human growth.</p>	<p><b>TORAT CHAIM</b></p> <p><b>חיים</b> LIFE</p> <p>We believe in bringing values to life.</p> <p>Jewish thought asserts that truth is made available to human beings not simply so they can marvel at it but also so that they can use it. Students studying literature, computer science, law, psychology or anything else are expected to take what they learn and implement it within their own lives as well as apply it to the real world around them.</p> <p>When people see a problem that needs addressing, their responsibility is to draw upon the truths they uncovered during their studies in finding a solution. They must live truth in the real world, not simply study it in the classroom.</p>	<p><b>TORAT ADAM</b></p> <p><b>אדם</b> INFINITE HUMAN WORTH</p> <p>We believe in the infinite worth of each and every human being.</p> <p>Judaic tradition first introduced to the world the radical proposition that each individual is created in the divine image and accordingly possesses incalculable worth and value.</p> <p>The unique talents and skills each individual possesses are a reflection of this divine image, and it is therefore a sacred task to hone and develop them. The vast expansive human diversity that results from this process is not a challenge but a blessing. Each of us has our own path to greatness.</p>	<p><b>TORAT CHESED</b></p> <p><b>חסד</b> COMPASSION</p> <p>We believe in the responsibility to reach out to others in compassion.</p> <p>Even as we recognize the opportunities of human diversity, Jewish tradition emphasizes the importance of common obligations. In particular, every human being is given the same responsibility to use his or her unique gifts in the service of others; to care for their fellow human beings; to reach out to them in thoughtfulness, kindness and sensitivity; and to form a connected community.</p>	<p><b>TORAT ZION</b></p> <p><b>ציון</b> REDEMPTION</p> <p>We believe that humanity's purpose is to transform our world for the better and move history forward.</p> <p>In Jewish thought, the concept of redemption represents the conviction that while we live in an imperfect world, we have a responsibility to strive toward its perfection. Regardless of a person's personal convictions about whether social perfection is attainable or even definable, it is the act of working toward it that gives our lives meaning and purpose. This common striving is an endeavor that brings all of humanity together.</p> <p>The Jewish people's task to build up the land of Israel into an inspiring model society represents this effort in microcosm. But it is part of a larger project that includes all of humankind. If the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice, then redemption represents our responsibility to work together in the service of God to move history forward.</p>
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of higher education that proudly and unapologetically seek truth, live by their values, respect the infinite worth of each and every individual, act with compassion and bring redemption to the world. Now more than ever we need the right ideas to take center stage and the need to emphasize the importance of books.

Yes, we need the sword, we need protection, but it must always be wrapped together with books, so we remember what it is we are fighting for.

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And with all the challenges of today we are presented with an enormous opportunity. Jewish hearts are open like no other time in Jewish history. All throughout the world, Jews have rediscovered their identity. They naturally understand that they are connected to something greater. This is not just about antisemitism and hate. This is about a People searching for an authentic connection to their core being. If we listen closely, we can hear Hashem calling.

And we are not just witnessing this phenomenon within the Jewish community, but throughout the world. Universities, colleagues at work, media outlets are turning to their

Jewish friends to make some sense of this all. Just recently I was a panelist at a breakfast on leadership in higher education by *U.S. News & World Report*. Together with me were some of the leaders of the largest university systems in the country, including the chancellor of California State University, which has over 500,000 students, and the chancellor of SUNY, which has over 1.4 million students. Why did they invite me to speak with my much smaller institution of 7,000 students? Because there is an understanding that we represent 3,000 years of tradition. The depth we bring to the conversation is unmatched, and the clarity with which we convey our values is refreshing in a higher education world that at times seems paralyzed by its own defensiveness.

In modern history there has been no greater conveyor of Torah values and Jewish ideas than Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks. He was the light who led the way. YU is, of course, his natural home base. We are so proud to house this center and we are deeply thankful to Lady Elaine, the Sacks family, Joanna and the Sacks foundation for their great work in

perpetuating his legacy. At YU, we are all Rabbi Sacks’ students, and we thank them for their continued support.

As the natural promulgators of Rabbi Sacks’ scholarly legacy, YU stands as a proverbial light tower in the darkness that we now face in our society. As an institution devoted to the book, we are perpetuating the Torah and its values in a world that so desperately needs guidance and direction. While we stand ready to defend ourselves and the Jewish people when needed, we are, and will always be, devoted to the pursuit of truth and knowledge. The sword when we must, but the book always.

My friends, there are moments in time when history invites us to participate in its unfolding. This is such a pivotal moment, and I am pleased to have such great partners in our work to move history forward.



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